

\mem\dernvnwg
January 15, 1996

Exercise (5:20 PM)

What do I want a biographer to know?

...the public?

In late 1969 I believed that the war would be very hard to end. I saw only one way it was likely to be ended: by a President who didn't have to feel that an end--the only way it could be ended, with a defeat of the long-term US policy--was a personal defeat for him. A new President, who hadn't yet made the war his own.

This could only be Nixon: quickly, before he planted his own prestige on some sort of success in Vietnam (other than success in getting out).

By September 1969 I had been informed that he had made threats of escalation in May unless terms were met--mutual withdrawal--that had clearly been rejected by early summer. By September I believed that the terms would not be met, and that he would choose to carry out the threats, at least as a response to any NVA offensive, which was likely sooner or later as he delayed sizeable withdrawals (as I was separately informed that he planned to do).

I didn't anticipate US escalation as a US initiative--i.e., prior to NVA escalation--nor did I expect the latter as early as the spring of 1970, when Nixon invaded Cambodia. It was sometime after Cambodia--which I saw as reinforcing the credibility of his threats of escalation--that I began to see the aim of these threats as being more ambitious than merely deterring NVN escalation or pressure. (WHEN DID I FIRST SUSPECT THIS? Was it possibly as late as Roger Morris' disclosure to me of Duck Hook in 1974? Ask MHH).

(Except for occasional reference to the Madman Theory in connection with nuclear threats--mentioned, I think, by the NYT obituary, though not by the Post--there is little media or academic notice of the existence or role of Nixon's threats in his policy, or what they implied about his "secret plan" or his continuing aims.)

Until the spring of 1972, Nixon and Kissinger persistently sought to achieve in negotiations--on the basis of secret threats, and both secret and overt escalations--mutual withdrawal, i.e., the removal of NVA forces from South Vietnam, as part of an overall strategy for assuring permanent control of Saigon and the major cities and populated areas by Thieu and ARVN. They did not accept the prospect of Communist control of Saigon during Nixon's term of

office, whether that would be four or eight years, i.e., after a "decent interval" or indeed, ever. They expected to hand over a South Vietnam to a new Administration in 1977 that would be able, if it chose, to prolong GVN control of major cities indefinitely without US troops, with at most US air support to ARVN and, if necessary, against NVN. This, they felt (probably correctly, I'm sorry to say, on the basis of evidence from 1973-74) as "peace" by the American public, since it would involve no US ground troops or casualties (nor US POWs, if it were not necessary to attack NVN). And "honor," since the US effort would have secured the removal of NVA forces and achieved its main objective of assuring the survival of our "allied" government. (It would, indeed, have been hard to tell from "victory", except that the NLF would not have been wiped out or forced to lay down arms, the GVN would not control all the territory of SVN, and conflict would probably continue: with some risk that the NLF, or a renewed NVA offensive, might eventually succeed despite US airpower.

In other words, Nixon and Kissinger would have restored a "cheap stalemate," which was not attainable so long as NVA forces were in SVN and ARVN and RVNAF were less capable, with a possibility that this would evolve into "peace" (with victory).

In the fall I didn't know Nixon's aims were this ambitious (I thought he was simply trying to stave off any further NVA offensive while preserving the status quo with far fewer US casualties or costs; I foresaw, as I told HSR, that at best, even if he achieved his aims, this meant "bombing Vietnam forever") nor did I know how committed he already was to his strategy and his aims, including the goal of keeping a pro-US regime in Saigon.

Even so, I thought he would become committed before long to a policy that would entail escalation, unless some change in the political environment outside the Executive Branch forced him, or encouraged him, to change course decisively.

[Is there any evidence, since then, that I was wrong about this? How many believed this at the time--outside the activist antiwar ranks? What did they foresee: before Cambodia? After Cambodia? If they had believed what I believed: What should they have done? What could have worked, to avert the next three years of war, and over 20,000 US dead (and hundreds of thousands of VNese)? Has anyone else asked these questions since then? What could and should Nixon, or outsiders, have done from 1969 on?

(Some assume he could and should have negotiated the 1973 Accords in 1969. But NVN might not have accepted the Thieu Government then, without an "ironclad" assurance that US airpower would be removed from the conflict, "even if a ceasefire broke down" and hostilities were renewed. If the Paris (declared, public) terms had been offered by the US in 1969 or 1970, NVN probably "should" have accepted them, even if Thieu had remained;

indeed, they could have proposed these themselves, openly!

Indeed, it would seem to have been sound for them to accept even mutual withdrawal, even under Thieu, although the NLF may have been so weak after Tet (which I didn't know in 1969) that this seemed unacceptably dangerous to NVN (and perhaps demoralizing to the NLF).

In 1973 the DRV did accept the Thieu regime, with the likelihood that this meant continued US airpower (despite the Accords). I.e., they took their chances. To be sure, the NLF had been rebuilt by that time (?); but so had ARVN. Thus, Nixon's bombing for four years had won this concession from the DRV (Thieu's continuing in power). It didn't look like enough to Thieu (without mutual withdrawal; he may not have counted on US airpower, or on that being enough). But it looked better to Nixon and Kissinger than it would have looked in 1969, because the failure of the offensive of 1972 to destroy ARVN had shown the power of US airpower to preserve a built-up ARVN, while detente with the SU and China encouraged them to believe that their support of NVN would be capped; if necessary, even major US escalation looked safer than before.

Could Nixon have arrived at this result, in 1973, by the same policy openly declared and pursued, or by some other open policy? Then he would not have had to be concerned about me, or the risk of exposure of his policy. There would have been no plumbers; or at least, no Fielding break-in, no May 3 assault, for Hunt to have as blackmail. So, even if there had been a CREEP operation against the Watergate, there would have been no (or less) need for Nixon to involve himself in obstruction of justice; nor could he have been clearly tied to any of the other crimes.

Or, if he had pursued the same secret policy, but he had not gone\ after me illegally...if he had not been as worried about the effect of my possible exposures on his policy...

But could he really have gotten away with this policy, if it were open? He didn't think so; and there is strong reason to believe that he couldn't.

So I was in a duel with him, over Vietnam policy, from October 1969 on. And he had even more reason than I realized to fear leaks: more secrets to conceal, more reason to conceal them, than I actually knew. And more reason to fear me than I knew, because people who knew his secrets were in touch with me and had taken unprecedented action (resigning from the White House) to separate themselves from his policy. (The defectors must have been under intense surveillance, or interrogation, from June 13 on).

But from my point of view as of October, 1969, Nixon didn't have much time to disown the war and extricate the US, before it became Nixon's war (too), one that he would become unwilling to lose while he was in office.

The Pentagon Papers, I hoped, would so discredit the war from its very beginning--in particular the Democratic escalation from 1961 (which the PP showed was recognized as doomed or inadequate) and Johnson's in 1954-65 (a Presidential conspiracy)--that Nixon might decide to decide against imitiating their secret policies in favor of disowning the war as an effort irretrievably discredited and botched by the Democrats. He could blame it on the Democrats with the help of the PP, and get us out.

(My efforts, just before this, to get Democrats to urge him to do just this had been rebuffed. I had concluded that Democrats preferred the war to go on under Nixon, making it his war too, than to end it quickly by taking the blame themselves, both for getting us in and for losing it. They may have felt: "Later, after he's in the soup with us, we can all work together on getting out; or, we can beat him over the head for not getting out on his watch." But later, of course, would be too late; he would not get out, if he would have to share the blame or take the main blame for losing, while he had power to prolong the war. (When he no longer had the responsibility, or the power to prolong the war, he would no longer have the power to end it, even if he wanted to. He would be like McNamara--if McNamara truly did want to end the war, as opposed to lowering the cost (once he was no longer responsible. In short, did his views change--again--once he was out of office? Did he oppose Nixon's policy? How much? How did he understand it? How does he see it now, and is he willing to criticise it? There is not a word of criticism, I believe, in his book for Nixon or "his friend" Kissinger, or their policies in Vietnam. Nothing on what they should have done (his list of occasions for getting out stops short, I believe, of 1968!) or what anyone should have done after he got out of office. Nor does he, in the book, explain his silence by his position as a "international civil servant" at the World Bank. Or note the hypothesis that LBJ gave him that job, at that time, precisely to shut him up, and keep him out of RFK's campaign.

For McNamara, as for so many others, the war end^{ed}, in effect, in 1968. For him, March 1968 rather than later.

[What clear precedents are there for these Presidential conspiracies--by LBJ and RN--other than FDR/'s maneuvering to get the US into WWII? And conceivably Wilson in getting us into WWI, after the election of 1916! The Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis were not intended to get us into major ground wars.

Nor was Kennedy's choice of Vietnam policy in 1961, though it launched us, or continued us, along that track. Still he could have backed off, as he apparently intended to, according to RFK and JTM/McN and O'Donnell, as he did in 1961 four times: the Bay of Pigs, Laos, the Berlin Wall, and Vietnam!) and in 1962 in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In all of these he had accepted small but unconscionable risks that he would not choose, or would not be able, to back off and cut losses in the actual event, risks of escalation, risks he had created or exacerbated by his public statements indicating high stakes, vital interests, and US commitment.

Nevertheless, he had "won" each of these gambles: he did not commit US ground troops in any of these cases, either at the moment of decision or later. And despite his continued public statements along the earlier lines--which were no stronger than had preceded his secret rejections of ground troops in each of these cases--there is good reason to suppose that he would, as RFK told me, have rejected US ground combat units at a later "moment of truth" in 1964-65, if he had lived.

That was one reason why it was so important that, as he told O'Donnell, that he win the election in 1964. But that gamble he lost. He did not (live to) win the election in 1964. And the winner of that election--whichever it had been!--was virtually certain to escalate the war.

Questions almost no one gets right:

--JFK's Vietnam policy: how it differed from Johnson's.

--How McNamara's Vietnam policy evolved under JFK, and then came to shift under Johnson. (Probably) Thus: the secret that McNamara is still protecting, about his own role. Not that JFK would have gotten out, and that this would have been in US interest (as he sees it now, or as of, say, 1967): but that he agreed with JFK and would have willingly have helped him get out in 1965; thus, that his later escalation of the war under LBJ served LBJ's vision of what was feasible and necessary and in the interests of the US (as well as himself: against "McNamara's friend RFK". Is it impossible that LBJ was right and that RFK would have attacked him for losing in Vietnam? And if RFK had done that, where would McNamara have stood?)

--The Johnson-McNamara Conspiracy of 1964-65, in which I was a (at times skeptical and reluctant, but nevertheless active) participant.

--The pressure towards further escalation in 1967-68 (even greater, and with earlier roots, than I realized at the time): towards the invasion of North Vietnam and the possible use of

nuclear weapons.

--My own role in opposing either of these, from mid-1967 on. Thus, I was actively struggling to prevent what is now still seen by some as "the way the war could have been won": what amounts to the Goldwater strategy of 1964 (repudiated by the public), or the JCS strategy of 1965 on (without the full JCS, perhaps, endorsing invasion. How widely was that accepted apart from Westy, and apparently, by 1968, Wheeler? Did Harold Johnson, Chief of the Army, agree? Generals in Vietnam? (ASK, say, Bruce Palmer, if he is still alive, or the commander of the 25th, W...the one I saw the night before I left Vietnam).

The public has never known just how close we may have come to:

--invading North Vietnam (as we invaded South Vietnam: with the cover, as in Lebanon, or Afghanistan, or at the last minute in Haiti, of being invited in by a friendly government, which we would not have had in North Vietnam);

--invading Cuba (Cuba I; Cuba II, just before it and at its climax; perhaps in early Johnson era, before the DomRep invasion (did we pretend to be invited in there?); and under Reagan/Haig;

--invading Nicaragua (the hidden agenda of North? Iran-Contra?

My concerns about Nicaragua certainly reflected my knowledge and beliefs about North Vietnam and Cuba!

And my concerns about Vietnam in 1967 (Bermuda Conference) and 1968 (leaks to NYT; consulting with RFK and Humphrey; Options) and 1969 (NSSM 1; PP) reflected my knowledge of the earlier secret risks--still to this day not appreciated by the public or most scholars--taken by Kennedy in Cuba II and by Johnson in 1964-65, the conspiratorial behavior, successful secrecy and lying, and willingness to threaten and if necessary carry out escalation. Along with my knowledge of nuclear war planning and command and control.

--Thus, my actions in 1967, (including RFK); 1968; 1969: against this strategy (which I did not foresee, Nixon had in mind from 1967 or earlier on: because he already saw it as Nixon's War, since 1954: when he had already supported nuclear threats, and use of US airpower, as the solution to Vietnam! (See his memoirs). As had Henry Kissinger! (see Eqbal Ahmad, and HAK's Foreign Affairs article! He may not have seen the Vietnam War as justifying civil disobedience, in 1969; but in the '50's he already saw it as justifying nuclear war!)

--Nixon's Secret Strategy for Vietnam: his aims, his strategy; secret in 1968 (another stolen election: with the help of direct

intervention with Thieu--and possibly money from Thieu?); secret from 1969-75 (despite his escalations and all my efforts); and secret to this day (except for Hersh's book), including to Oliver Stone and the recent TNT docudrama on Nixon and Kissinger.

--(Thus) Why I pursued the effort to publish the Pentagon Papers--in 1969 and for 21 months thereafter--despite believing all that time (during which I married) that I would most probably go to jail for the rest of my life.

--And: What I continued to aim at and struggle for (press conferences, public speeches, articles (especially just before PP) and appearance at Miami Republican Convention!, and release of NSSM-1, lobbying with McNamara, Bundy...

after June 1971, particularly with the escalation in April-May 1972 (which must have had the White House particularly concerned, with Gravel's attempted release of NSSM-1 and their impending carrying out of Duck Hook: almost surely including the renewal of nuclear threats to North Vietnam, as indicated by Eqbal).

--Thus: Nixon and Kissinger had a problem with me, from June 13 on. As they knew from what Mathias told them (I had Nixon, NSC documents, that I had not yet released to the press); I was close to Halperin, and to the other defectors--Lake, Morris, perhaps Watts and Lynn (not really)--and the latter all knew of Duck Hook.

[I had also been close to Winston Lord! I talked to him on the phone as recently as the MIT Conference, the night of the pre-invasion bombing of Laos! What must he have had to say to HAK, and others, about me, and the PP?

Lord must know everything: about HAK's attitude to me and the Papers--about what Young knew and told HAK?--about NSSM-1!--and above all, about the secret strategy on Vietnam! Who, living, would know about this, under HAK? Would Haig talk? Would Butterfield know?

They had to: a) shut me up; b) discredit me, and any further revelations; c) shut up anyone who might follow me, and disclose documents (deter them, by prosecuting me; investigate leaks; pull them into a conspiracy indictment, if necessary and possible: Halperin must have been a major target! The other defectors, including Lake (talk to Morris, Watts). Gelb. Warnke, Clifford. Doubters of the policy at Defense, and perhaps State: Cook! (N mentions!) Richardson?! Laird; Pursley.

The discrediting would happen in the investigations: Hebert, etc. WHY DIDN'T THESE HAPPEN? (The concern about the Vietnamese elections of 1972 is mysterious, and doesn't seem adequate to explain postponement. Was it, the screw-up of the Fielding break-in, concern that the plumbers would be revealed? But they

continued to pursue a profile of me, without much success, into November).

--Thus: Why Nixon hired the plumbers and OK'd the illegal actions against me: which gave Hunt strong blackmail leverage after he was caught and was sure to be convicted, then immunized and asked about other actions.

--In particular: Why the May 3 attempted assault on me (still unknown to nearly everyone. Apparently not mentioned in the Strobe's book--"unless by Barker"--as well as the Stone book). Perhaps the main thing that really had to be covered up, even more than Fielding! (given what Barker, and presumably Sturgis, would testify as to their orders; and Colson's direct involvement, naming the President as the initiator!)

[TALK TO MAGRUDER ABOUT THIS; and perhaps the others mentioned in the FOIA files; TALK TO COLSON. WOULD HE--NOT--HAVE KNOWN OF THE VIETNAM STRATEGY? RICHARDSON? SCHLESINGER? LAIRD, OR NOT?]

--The real story of Watergate: Why the President had to do what he could to keep Hunt--and Liddy! (though he proved to be a "good soldier," Waffen-SS-type, no threat)--from being indicted, and later from talking, from June 20 on.

It was not concern about their talking about Watergate: Hunt couldn't reach into the White House on this, or except for hearsay, even as high as Mitchell in Creep (maybe his friend Colson, on pushing their intelligence program: but Colson couldn't be proved to have known what they planned to do, and may not even have known).

To this day, NO ONE has proven, or even alleged with knowledge, that Nixon ordered or even knew of the Watergate break-ins. (Indeed, Butterfield speculates that Nixon did not know of the intended break-in in June, though he speculates that he must have known of the earlier one. Wouldn't this certainly be on tape? Were none of the June 17 tapes subpoenaed? Or, released?

Strobe speculated to me, today, that the June 20 18-1/2 minute gap must have dealt with Hunt and the Fielding break-in, and the need to keep Hunt out of the clutches of prosecutors. but surely also the May 3 attempt on me! which had just happened, and which Colson was fully involved in, along with the President. After all, that had just involved the whole cast, including Magruder, Hunt, Liddy, all the Cubans and Sturgis, Strachan, the Andreas funds! (not Mitchell, as far as I know! But probably Kissinger, and quite possibly Haig, and Haldeman, had all been involved in the need to shut me up fast, before May 8.

New thought: this one Kissinger had to have been involved in, since it directly involved an immediate connection to their secret

Vietnam policy, at a critical moment, and even to their nuclear threats. This would not explain Kissinger's earlier attacks on me in 1971; but he would have been the one most concerned to shut me up at this moment. Also there must be discussions on tape of Gravel's attempted release of NSSM-1, what to do about it, and about the Newsweek revelations.

Again, Lord would have been consulted (about NSSM-1).

I wonder: How much did anyone in the Nixon Administration talk to McNamara about the Pentagon Papers? Did HAK refrain from this? Who did McNamara talk to about this? Maybe this is part of McNamara's strange relation to me now.

*HAK close to McN
and Felling!*

[TALK TO MATHIAS. (has he died?)

What was McNamara's relation to HAK's Vietnam policy? Did he, not, support it? What did he do at the time of Cambodia: "desert" his friend Kissinger, like others? (At May 8, he refused to criticise the mining of Haiphong).

[TALK TO CLIFFORD, WARNKE, COLBY.]

[ASK KALB BROTHERS ABOUT NUCLEAR THREATS IN MAY 1972. ASK VIETNAMESE.]

[talk to McNamara's ghost]

[Who will talk--who won't now--when McNamara dies? (Yarmolinsky?) When HAK dies? (See obituaries on him!) Has no one's lips been opened by Nixon's death?]

[Dead: Boudins; Haldeman; Goodell; Nixon; Mitchell; Martha Mitchell; LBJ, JFK, Humphrey; Sturgis; Ervin;

[could I talk to any of the prosecution team?

--The link between Watergate and the Vietnam War! (Via me, and the plumbers--they were still trying to "stop leaks," really, in May 3, 1972--when they were no longer nominally working for the White House but for CREEP! Yet they were still taking operational orders from Colson and the President; and their first operation, their first actual use of the (illegal) campaign funds was not anything on the campaign, not part of Gemstone!, not against the Democrats or Watergate or O'Brien, but against me, on the war.

[If I could crack this incident--reveal more about the motivation, which would known to who? HAK, Haig, probably Colson--in fact, this is one of the best indications that he got into Vietnam considerations (though he conceivably might not have been told why they needed to put me out of action at just that moment)--

Haldeman(?) (what was Young doing at this point?) Butterfield? (Martinez' Case Officer: ask Scott) (head of Miami station: still called JM/WAVE?).....

talk to prosecutors on this. Ask Dean again what he knew of it, when, how it figured in cover-up. Ask Ehrlichman?

--The real strategy of the Nixon cover-up and defense, from June 1972 to August-September 1974--over two years! (including over a year after the firing of Dean, the end of my trial and the indictment of Mitchell, etc.)

[collaborate with Scott Armstrong? or is he too close to Woodward? Talk to Bernstein! To Woodward? unless Hersh...]

Thus, the rationality, the relative competence, of the Nixon/Haldeman/Dean operation, and the post-Dean team: the fact that "they did their best, under the circumstances...!"

--The struggle over Vietnam policy after the start of Watergate (which is a year after my trial starts), after the Christmas bombing and the Paris Accords (as my court trial starts), and even after Nixon leaves. (Ford, Watergate, CIA? Indochina Peace Campaign, Congress...) till May 1, 1975 (and Mayaguez).

(Followed by: Pol Pot; reeducation camps; Chinese boat people...

SU in Afghanistan; Nicaragua/El Salvador (starting under Carter);

Death squad approach: (earliest known, Saddam Hussein in 1962 in Iraq?! Indonesia, 1965. Vietnam, 1967-.... Guatemala, late 60's; Brazil, late 60's. (earlier: Greece, late 40's? What of Greek colonels, from 1967 on, under LBJ, then Nixon? Italy? Then Argentina, Chile. Ecuador, Honduras. Plans for Cuba: operation 40, Castro. (Philippines, EGL?) Diem, late 50's? Iran, SAVAK. Torture, death squads, genocide. When did East Timor start? Collab. with South Africa. (and Israel collaboration, with South Africa and Central America). Israel's "Sacred Terrorism." Lebanon, 1982.

And not only "our side." SU; Pol Pot; China; (Japan in WWII, along with Germany); Rwanda/Burundi (France?); Mozambique (us?);

[Larger story: State terrorism (and insurgent terrorism) (see Tolstoi): (see French Rev; and tsarist counter-rev...); genocide (against "savages"; later...); strategic bombing; nuclear weapons.

My introduction: Hiroshima; nuclear war plans (and strategic bombing); Cuba II; (less, Vietnam! I fought against charge of "genocide," e.g., against Aaron Asher who quoted me falsely! in

Vietnam; but of course I worried about escalation to terrorist levels, especially in North Vietnam; then, there was drift toward torture and massacre (My Lai, revealed 1969; Col. Herbert...Tony, on torture and herbicide); my concern about nuclear weapons from late 1967 on (hence my concern with Khe Sanh--correct, more than I knew!--and my leaks of March 1968, earlier Bermuda Declaration.

(On this, Clifford, Warnke, Halperin, Gelb would all know something; they were all suspected, report was made to Clifford.

Then--I always seem to forget these as "leaks," since they came after I had started copying the Papers--the Chau leaks, and investigation, of spring 1970. These could have gotten me separated from my clearance, and fired from RAND. I had already shipped off all the PP to Norvill Jones, had I not? But I still had lots to copy, including Simon's papers on 1964 summer--good stuff--and perhaps still, the NSSM that HAK may really have been maximally worried about!

(Perhaps a link between that NSSM and Vietnam and me: HAK may have been looking at first-strike--and second-strike--options particularly in 1969 because of knowledge that nuclear threats were being made and might be carried out, against an ally of both the Soviet Union and China. As in 1961, he would have been interested in the credibility of our threat to escalate these, if either had responded or threatened to respond; and our ability to deter all-out attack if we did carry out initial threats or escalations.

In other words, he would have been specially interested in "credible" and "usable" options (not finding the latter) in 1969, for the same reasons that JFK was in 1961 (threats over Berlin) and during the Cuban Missile Crisis! A secret nuclear crisis was underway! This could be the genesis of interest in improved "options"; along with the nuclear threats Nixon made over Jordan in the fall of 1970, precisely when HAK wanted me to come to the White House to talk about options. (Hypothesis: these involved the Middle East, not Vietnam. He "didn't want to discuss their Vietnam policy with me..." and "I am worried about Bill Rogers' Middle East policy."

[HERSH knows this period]

New thought: This could be another reason for not being interested in SALT negotiations in 1969, and specifically for not wanting to abandon MIRV, despite interagency interest in doing so!

Just as Kennedy was making nuclear threats (with my help! Somewhat inadvertently) in 1961 and thus not interested in using the new SNIE to move quickly toward disarmament (before Khrushchev actually did build missiles--or lost office, as both of them did!)...so, Nixon was making active nuclear threats in 1969! Which Halperin--involved in the arms control decisions--did not know then about his Vietnam intentions.